

Oversight of Publications

Section A - Introduction

It is the policy of the Board of Education to require reasonable oversight of publications and school-sponsored media as outlined in this policy.

Section B - Definitions

Libel - The willful or negligent publication of false and unprivileged statements that do demonstrable harm to a living person's reputation.

Obscene - Comments that are lewd; impure; indecent; calculated to shock the moral sense of humans by a disregard of chastity or modesty, or objectionable or offensive to accepted community standards of decency.

Prior Review - The process of reviewing and approving school-sponsored media prior to publication or distribution.

Prior Restraint - A decision to make changes to or otherwise not publish or distribute school-sponsored media.

School Official - Principal or designee.

School-Sponsored Media - Any material that is prepared, written, published, or broadcast by a student journalist, distributed, or generally made available to members of the student body or public and prepared under the direction of a student media advisor.

Slander - The speaking of false statements of fact that harm a living person's reputation.

Student Journalist - A public high school student who gathers, compiles, writes, edits, photographs, records, or prepares information for the creation or dissemination in school-sponsored media.

Student Media Adviser - An individual employed, appointed, or designated by the District to supervise or provide instruction relating to the creation or dissemination of school-sponsored media.

Section C - School-Sponsored Media

School-sponsored publications, productions, and websites are generally governed by the Speech Rights of Student Journalists Act (105 ILCS 80), other applicable laws and regulations, and Board Policies. In general, that entails the following:

Subject to applicable law, regulation, and Board Policy, student journalists are responsible for determining the news, opinion, feature, and advertising content of those publications, productions, and websites.

Student journalists, with the prior input of the Media Adviser, must:

1. Make decisions based upon news value and guided by the Code of Ethics provided by the Society of Professional Journalists, National Scholastic Press Association, Journalism Education Association, or other relevant group;
2. Produce media based upon professional standards of accuracy, objectivity, and fairness;
3. Review material to improve sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and punctuation;
4. Check and verify all facts and verify the accuracy and context of all quotations;
5. In the use of personal opinions, editorial statements, and/or letters to the editor, provide opportunity and space for the expression of differing opinions within the same medium(a) to align with the District's media literacy curriculum mandate in Illinois School Code (105 ILCS 5/27-20.08); and
6. Include an author's name with any personal opinions and editorial statements.

No expression made by students in the exercise of freedom of speech or freedom of the press under this policy shall be deemed to be an expression of the District or an expression of Board Policy (105 ILCS 80/20).

All school-sponsored media and related publications are considered a closed forum for the purposes of student expression. Additionally, school-sponsored media and related publications that are connected to a course (e.g., co-curricular activities), are at all times subject to prior advisor and school official review for instruction, feedback, and assessment purposes.

Section D - Exceptions

Student journalists may not create, produce, or distribute school-sponsored media that,

1. Is libelous, slanderous, or obscene;
2. Constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;
3. Violates federal or state law, including the constitutional rights of third parties; or
4. Incites students to:
 - a. Commit an unlawful act; or
 - b. Violate any of the Board Policies or
 - c. Materially and substantially disrupt the orderly operation of the school (105 ILCS 80/15).

The foregoing list is referred to herein as the "exceptions."

Section E - Prior Review and Prior Restraint

All student media advisers shall follow the procedures listed below before school-sponsored media is published or otherwise distributed:

1. As part of the student media adviser's responsibilities, the adviser shall implement "prior review," ensuring that all school-sponsored media complies with State statutes, including, without limitation, the exceptions set forth in Section D of the policy and Board policies.
2. When the student media adviser reasonably determines that school-sponsored media may violate one of the exceptions, the adviser shall, prior to printing or otherwise distributing school-sponsored media, notify the Assistant Principal of Student Activities.
3. The Assistant Principal of Students Activities shall review the school-sponsored content in question, gather all necessary information, and present a recommendation to the Principal. Should the student media adviser disagree with the recommendation, they may express their opinion for consideration by the Principal.

4. The Principal shall determine whether one of the exceptions applies. If an exception applies, the Principal shall implement “prior restraint.” This may include reviewing, editing, and/or deleting such media material before publication or distribution of the media. The decision of the Principal is final.

When a potential exception has been identified, no publication or distribution of school-sponsored media shall occur until after the Principal makes a determination.

Section F - Non-School Sponsored Publications Accessed or Distributed On Campus

For purposes of this section and the following section, a publication includes, without limitation:

1. Written or electronic print material,
2. Audio-visual material on any medium including electromagnetic media (e.g., images, digital files, flash memory, etc.), or combinations of these whether off-line (e.g., a printed book, digital files, etc.) or online (e.g., any website, social networking site or app, database for information retrieval, etc.), or
3. Information or material on electronic devices (e.g., text or voice messages delivered by cell phones, tablets, and other hand-held devices).

Creating, distributing, and/or accessing non-school sponsored publications shall occur at a time and place and in a manner that will not cause disruption, be coercive, or result in the perception that the distribution or publication is endorsed by the District.

Students are prohibited from creating, distributing, and/or accessing at school or on school resources, any publication that:

1. Will cause a material and substantial disruption of the proper and orderly operation and discipline of the school or school activities;
2. Violates the rights of others, including but not limited to material that is libelous, slanderous, or obscene, invades the privacy of others, or infringes on a copyright;
3. Is socially inappropriate or inappropriate due to the maturity level of the students, including but not limited to material that is obscene, pornographic, or pervasively lewd and vulgar, contains indecent and vulgar language, or sexting as defined by Board Policy and Student Handbooks;
4. Is reasonably viewed as promoting illegal drug use; or
5. Incites students to violate any Board Policies.

Accessing or distributing on-campus includes accessing or distributing on school property or at school-related activities. A student engages in gross disobedience and misconduct and may be disciplined for:

1. Accessing or distributing forbidden material, or
2. Writing, creating, or publishing such material intending for it to be accessed or distributed at school.

Section G - Non-School Sponsored Publications Accessed or Distributed Off-Campus

A student engages in gross disobedience and misconduct and may be disciplined for creating and/or distributing a publication that:

1. Causes a substantial disruption or a foreseeable risk of a substantial disruption to school operations, or

2. Interferes with the rights of other students or staff members.

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